THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED) : (a) As per available information, approximately 900 Indian civilian prisoners including 54 PoWs are believed to be in Pakistani jails since the last three years. In the year 2002, no Indian prisoner was released by the Pakistani authorities. In 2003 and 2004, the Pakistani authorities released 38 and 36 prisoners respectively. (These figures exclude the released fishermen.) Pakistan has never acknowledged the presence of Indian Prisoners of War in its custody.

(b) As per available information, approximately 300 Pakistani civilian prisoners are in detention and going through various stages of legal process. India released 6 Pakistani civilian prisoners in the year 2002 followed by 21 and 58 respectively in 2003 and 2004. In addition, consular access was granted to 14 Pakistani civilian prisoners in 2002, 84 in 2003 and 135 in 2004.

(c) and (d) Government of India, through diplomatic channels, has been consistently taking up the matter of release/repatriation of prisoners with the Pakistan Government. The issue was taken up during the Foreign Secretary level talks between India and Pakistan in New Delhi on September 4, 2004 as well as during the visit to India by the Prime Minister of Pakistan on November 23-24, 2004. Consular access to more prisoners, and release of those whose nationalities have been confirmed after such access, is in process.

Indo-Japan co-operation

2278. SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Prime Minister of India and Japan have agreed to set-up a multi-disciplinary graph to enhance economic ties focusing on trade, investment and information technology;

(b) whether Prime Minister also desires to have a joint grouping of India, Japan, South Korea and China for pursuing economic co-operation; and

(c) if so, by when above mentioned groups are expected to be set up indicating what support/response India received from countries mentioned above for increasing bilateral trade and investment in our country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED) : (a) During the meeting between Prime Minister and Prime Minister of Japan on November 29, 2004 at the ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, Laos, the two leaders agreed to establish a Joint Study Group to undertake a comprehensive review of economic and commercial links between India and Japan and give its recommendations on further expansion of those links.

(b) No such proposal is under consideration at present.

(c) The modalities for the establichment of the Joint Study Group are under discussion with the Japanese government.

Visit of New Zealand's Prime Minister to India

2279. DR. AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the New Zealand Prime Minister visited New Delhi in October, this year;

(b) if so, whether she indicated her country's support to India's stand on international terrorism;

(c) what was her stand about the Kashmir issue and the continuing talks between India and Pakistan; and

(d) the details of the agreements or understandings reached during her visit?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Prime Minister Helen Clark of New Zealand paid a State Visit to India from 16 to 20 October, 2004.

(b) During discussions, the Prime Minister noted the commonality of interests between New Zealand and India on international terrorism.

(c) The Prime Minister of New Zealand positively assessed the ongoing talks between India and Pakistan. The issue of Kashmir was not touched upon.